

Chapter 438 Basically just exposition, isn't it?

“What’s the most powerful creature you have ever met?” Ilea asked. They were soon reaching the three hour mark when her little friend could leave its collective once more.

“*We are the most powerful.*” the Fae replied.

“You’re pretty fucking full of yourself.”

“*We are very dense, yes.*”

“In a more conventional way... pure force of nature... who can level the biggest mountains with their spells, who can survive the most insane natural conditions, who has the densest mana?”

“*We have decided not to tell you.*”

“You’re pretty insecure for a being as old as you are.”

“*A collection of insecurities. You are pretty mean for someone so weak,*” it said.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it that way. You are the most powerful being I’ve met.” their conversation had devolved into quips and banter but it seemed both enjoyed it.

The Fae giggled. “*That is how it should be. We have collective knowledge, span through realms and are the most beautiful, violent, prosperous, good and smartest being. Amongst many many other qualities, all of which of positive nature, we assure you.*”

“Collection of high opinions as well, hmm?” Ilea teased.

“*Of course. We do enjoy discussing our greatness.*”

Ilea nodded. “You could probably form a cult or religion among humans or other sapient creatures. With that power and sheer density, I’m sure a lot of people will follow,” Ilea suggested.

“*No... there is already an annoying level of reverence for our parts among those you call Dark Ones. It is why many of us choose not to travel among their lands,*” it explained.

“Just an immortal god looking for some real friends and stories,” she said and smiled. “Sucks that you can’t shape shift or hide your description from identify. Are there no skills for that?”

“*Potentially. Yet we only have theories. If anything the ability is locked to us. There are ways to appear weaker to skills such as identify so be aware of that. At this point you should know anyway to trust more than just a skill like that.*”

“I know, I know. I generally don’t care much about levels anyway. Except for the fact that higher leveled monsters provide some good experience.”

“*Always focused on killing. Short lived races...*” it faked a huff.

Ilea had certainly become more comfortable with the being in the last hours. By now she felt like she was taking part in an after work gossip session. The creature wasn’t lonely, with its hundreds or even thousands of occupants but many seemed interested in talking to the lowly human.

‘ding’ ‘You have learned the General Skill: Oxygen Repository

Oxygen Repository – lvl 1

Due to unfortunate and/or sexual circumstances, you have been deprived of air for extended periods of time. Somehow you have pushed through to survive. Your body has learned that it may not always be supplied with what it needs. You may survive much longer without oxygen and may store what little you can get for extended periods of time. Apologies for ruining your sex life.

Nice.

“You suggest we just train our skills until we reach suitable levels? Most would die of old age. Especially those not healers.”

“Excuses.”

“You even need class levels to get higher tiers. It’s not like skill levels can be leveled indefinitely, you know? What’s the cap on third tier skills anyway?”

“Thirty. Usually.”

“Great... and when should my next evolution happen? Four hundred?”

“Evolutions depend on classes and achievements. Yours being so insanely powerful, we do not expect another one until you reach level five hundred. Someone with vastly weaker ones might achieve one at three fifty or four hundred.”

“I’ll probably cap my skills then... ah well. Plenty to do and learn anyway, even if they’re at the highest level.”

“Finally, something wise out of your mouth.”

“Did everyone with decent manners and some bloody fucking respect tune out of the conversation by now?”

“Pretty much. Not like you have groundbreaking knowledge to share at this point. Stories would be interesting but you lack the skill to tell them. Maybe a bard of some kind shall learn of your adventures.”

“You’d rather listen to a bard sing about me than hear the stories directly?”

“Some of us, yes. Others prefer an accurate historical retell. This has been a debate for many millennia. Art or history.”

“Subjective,” Ilea said and shrugged.

“As are many things. It does not however mean that no debate should be held. It saddens some of us that true poets and visionary minds rarely reach your level of power. Too conflicted.”

“They read and write instead of going out there to fight. It’s the world itself that causes that problem. Not like you can’t visit them in your weaker and more individual forms,” Ilea said.

“True, though we are limited in our conversation skills outside of this form.”

“Am I technically immortal by now? I mean purely age wise. I know people kind of stop aging after level two hundred.”

“A certain level of Vitality is necessary to stop aging in humans. Two hundred is usually around the point where it slows down so much that your perception coupled with the way you experience the flow of time leads to the illusion that people do not age. Healing skills like your own help as well

and with your level it is doubtful that age would be the end of you. Even if you decided to stop adventuring at this very moment.”

“You do know a lot. When is my birthday? I lost track when I came to Elos.”

“Your body has reformed hundreds of times since we have met you and you believe we are capable of determining the date of your creation?”

Ilea nodded. “You do seem so terribly wise. Maybe I was wrong.”

“You lack both vocabulary and wit to taunt us. It is impossible with the data we have.”

“When’s your birthday then?”

“It was two months ago, on the fourth day. The year however is sadly lost, even to us. Our first millennia were shaped by strife and survival.”

“Oh? Interesting. Do tell. Were you born weaker than you are now?”

“Not in the sense you suggest. Our strength has increased since then but not to an exponential degree like your own. Humans have incredible potential, capable to be formed and shaped into what they deem useful and desirable. We did not have that luxury. Many may argue that the strength and ability we were born with is preferable to the potential your species possesses, coupled with your incredibly weak bodies and minds.”

“We have fought and battled, creatures long forgotten by the worlds and its inhabitants. Some laying dormant since time immemorial, others ripped to pieces as small as atoms, returned to the flow of mana itself. We have traveled the realms, many yet to become stable, elemental forces powerful enough to strain even our existence. We have witnessed yet have not yet understood. An infant, steered by instinct.”

“You saw the creation of the universe then? Was there a mother or father that formed you? A being maybe, like an architect or smith that formed the realms?”

“We witnessed creation, the forming of whole worlds and yet there was time before we were, there were worlds and realms even before we came to be. These are questions we have pondered on for many centuries and yet we lack the answers you seek. They are ever fleeting, folding and changing with each new piece we find to set into the puzzle that is space and time itself.”

“There was no mother or father. We are born of the arcane itself, formed by will and magic, the want to live, to observe, to experience. Many a creature has thought themselves the architect of life, some human like yourself. Yet their creations are incomparable to the vastness of space itself. They could not comprehend the terrifying depth of the universe and all its realms.”

“Are realms like dimensions? Or just planets within the universe? Maybe far away from each other.”

“Your realm has pondered questions that few humans here dare ask. It must have been a peaceful place. To allow for such luxury. The universe holds both physical planets and realms. They are all part of the same space and yet for you it would perhaps not seem so. You may find yourself able to travel to the moons and yet find yourself unable to ever reach another realm, no matter how many planets you visit. Only those touched by mana can thrive with life and only those are connected within the net of the arcane. It is why you have not appeared on a planet devoid of air or one made up entirely of gas.”

“I’m not sure I understand. So there are different dimensions? But there are also planets.”

“Realms are not dimensions, they are merely fissures in space itself. Another view perhaps... yet we find it impossible to explain such matters to one unknowing of space and its secrets.”

“True understanding of a topic shows when you can explain it to a novice,” Ilea said with a smile.

“You are not a novice. Explain the concept of meditation to an infant human. It will not understand.”

“Eh... care to share some knowledge on other sapient species of this realm?” she asked instead.

“No. Where’s the excitement otherwise? These lands stretch far and wide and so far you have only visited a single continent. Keep adventuring and you’ll find out yourself.”

“You’re very particular with what knowledge you share,” Ilea said.

“It is enjoyable to see your frustration. And yet you have learned many things throughout this talk.”

“That I have. Another one for you. What’s the capital of Assyria?”

“We have no recollection of a place with that name, in any of the languages we comprehend. We suspect you are referencing a work of fiction with a humorous intent. You do that often. It is a little confusing. Perhaps you have traveled alone for too long, developing a need to joke and reference things only you would understand. As a way to cover your insecurities? Or perhaps you are simply intent to spread confusion and chaos in the minds of those too advanced to accept the concept of such meaningless thoughts.”

“Good theories there, Superfae.”

“The next logical step after Baron would be a king, would it not? We accept however the title of Superfae.”

“You’re not willing to provide a map either, right? Or some hidden gems when it comes to Elos cuisine... eh, you don’t exactly eat so that would be a waste,” she said and didn’t wait for an answer. “How old do Elves get? Do they have similar limitations and break points as humans?”

“Their birthrate is much lower than that of humans. Their life expectancy is close to five centuries if they remain at level two hundred.”

“Wait... they’re born at level two hundred?”

“The level of a creature is merely a representation of their magical ability, sturdiness, strength as well as their other stats. Few creatures born in mana rich environments start without a class and at level zero. The domain in which an elf is born likely determines the first class it possesses. We have yet to meet an elf below the level of two hundred, thus our theory that they are born at such power. Changes are possible later on in life but their paths are potentially predetermined. More so than those of humans.”

“I guess. I mean it wouldn’t make sense if all the monsters had to kill and level up to the respective strength they have,” Ilea said.

“Exactly. Which is why you should be cautious to approach a level two hundred human compared to a level two hundred elf. While the latter might be older and might have more actual combat experience, they tend to underestimate foes due to the power they have likely always known.”

“But there’s always a class associated with level, right? You said a level two hundred monster is about as strong as a level two hundred human. Are monster classes just more powerful?”

“It is vastly more varied and complicated than that but essentially that is what you are looking at. Strong hide or plate armor can make a large difference in defense. An intrinsic and powerful magical ability can make a big difference in offensive power. Learning the usual levels of certain monster races as well as starting points of various sapient creatures will help you determine the experience and real strength of an opponent. You should however trust your instincts more than anything else, especially skills like identify. A false sense of both security and danger have caused many deaths as well as they have prevented achievements.”

“The fact that you faced Elementals shows that perhaps you should take a small step back before battling enemies far beyond your capabilities.”

“Eh, I survived, didn’t I?”

“That you did. Back to your question about age. Elves beyond level two to three hundred likely share a similar fate to yours. Death by old age is a luxury only few will experience.”

“I expected as much. That means there’s a bunch of really high level elves out there.”

“Potentially. Their lifestyles and competition amongst themselves as well as their war with the Taleen has kept their numbers low, culled even now compared to a thousand years back. Another ten thousand years and their race might very well be wiped off this continent.”

“Meaning there are more elves on another continent?”

“That is for you to find out,” the Fae said and giggled.

‘ding’ ‘Space Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 2’

“Sure it is. Do you know an order amongst humans called the Golden Lily?”

“We have not heard of such. It is a rare flower that grows only in the mountain range separating the human plains and the north. A specific density of mana is required, as well as a cold climate. If it is a secretive organization, we are not an authority on the subject.”

“I see. Would you mind identifying a couple of items for me? And telling me what they do?”

“Trinkets? Magical items? Of course. It is of special interest to a large part of us. Yet many creations lack depth and power, materials valuable and ancient, their properties wasted and fused into meaningless artifacts.”

“My necklace for example... it’s a storage item.”

“Bound to your soul and mana. A rather dangerous prospect. It will drain resources from you to stay intact. The enchantment however is rather well done. Better than the bracelet you hold.”

“It would have melted ages ago without that connection. Is it dangerous to wear?”

“We know humans hold a strong connection to the material. It will not hinder you in a meaningful way. Should you ever disregard possessions entirely, we suggest you do not wear them anymore. If you must, as some of us does, manipulating space itself to create secure storage controlled by your mana instead of such crude devices would be preferable.”

“Doubt I could ever learn that. They’ve been working out well for me. Do you think I should reduce it to one item instead of two?”

“Considering your mana pool and the strength of your soul, the difference would be marginal.”

Ilea looked through her possessions. *Eh, it's been so long. If anybody doesn't give a shit about it and might actually be able to tell me something, it's this thing.*

She summoned the Tungsten Key. She noted that it cost a significant amount of mana to get it out but with her improved pool, it didn't matter in the least. “Found this in one of the Taleen dungeons ages ago. Any clue what it is?” she said and held the pyramid shaped thing in her palm.

“A key... of great importance it seems to its creators. Various enchantments are placed to make it difficult to locate, difficult to store within an item such as yours. One of twelve it seems. What it opens we do not know. Should you be intent on finding more of its kind, this key could serve as a tool to locate its other parts. There are warnings engraved in the Taleen tongue.”

“What do they say?”

“They speak of great responsibility, of protecting the twelve keys, protecting their very race. It does seem like they found their end nonetheless.”

“Do you know about that? Haven't met a Taleen.”

“The war culled their numbers. Many of them were proud and fought alongside their creations instead of focusing fully on their power. Those who disagreed and were tired of battle have long joined other Dwarven communities though their secrets remain hidden, most now buried within their tombs.”

“Can you help me locate the other keys?”

“We read runes, we do not forge enchantments. However it should be possible for a skilled human enchanter. Your strength should surely allow for you to find and meet one.”

“Already know one. Thanks. What about this?” she stored the key and summoned one of the blood containers. She wanted to ask Trian or even Kevan about it but the Fae seemed just as good if not better.

“It is from the Descent, is it not? We believe it to be the Blood Manipulation agent used to spread the corruption. It is dormant in this state, its use versatile. A talented blood mage or alchemist might find use for it.”

“You don't think it's dangerous?”

“Potentially. As is metal ore after it is worked by a master smith.”

“I get it,” she summoned her crate of miscellaneous items and started looking through. Ilea held it up with her ashen limbs, unsure still what exactly the space around her was composed of. An ashen ball she formed and dropped vanished after it fell for a couple seconds.

“Know what these are?” she asked and showed the Fae her collection of figures she had found under the Azarinth temple.

“The symbols are elvish. Each showing one of the domains.”

“Hmm... eh most of my stuff isn't very interesting. Here... the mind core of a Goliath Veramath.”

“Congratulations. Proof of a successful hunt.”

“I mean, what can I do with it?”

“With your impressive Mind Magic capabilities? Maybe use it to decorate your home.”

“Nice one,” Ilea murmured.